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LETTER DATED 10 NOVEMBER 1992 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to refer to the statement by the President of the Security Council, dated 8 October 1992 (S/24637), on the situation in Georgia. In that statement, the Council expressed its support of the decision by the Secretary-General to send another mission to Georgia, endorsed its proposed mandate, looked forward to receiving the report by the Secretary-General following that mission, and expressed its readiness to consider his recommendations concerning the contribution which the United Nations could make to the implementation of the agreement of 3 September 1992.

The mission, which was in Georgia from 13 to 16 October 1992, was headed by Mr. Antoine Blanca, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and included Mr. Gustave Feissel, Director of the Europe Division of the Department of Political Affairs.

I have considered the report, including its conclusions and observations, presented to me by the mission. I am pleased to annex hereto a summary of the report for the information of the members of the Council.

In the three weeks since the first United Nations mission to Georgia the situation has dramatically worsened. Following the renewed fighting on 1 October and the collapse of the 3 September agreement (S/24523, annex), Georgia finds itself on the brink of a conflict that could involve neighbouring countries. Unless the situation is redressed, the possibility of the eruption of a major conflict is high. The recent developments appear to have adversely affected the relations between Georgia and the Russian Federation and have thereby handicapped the efforts of President Yeltsin to promote a solution. The urgency of a summit meeting among the parties involved to put the 3 September agreement back on track is evident.

In response to the Council's invitation to the Secretary-General to make recommendations on how the United Nations could support the implementation of the 3 September agreement, I believe that the United Nations, in support of

the efforts of President Yeltsin, could help the parties in regaining mutual confidence, overcoming obstacles to the peace process initiated at the Moscow conference, mitigating evident suspicions among the parties and reversing what seems to be a rising mood to rely more on force than on a negotiated solution.

The Council may wish to call on the parties to meet at the highest level without preconditions to establish an effective cease-fire and to resume the peace process in line with the 3 September agreement. It could recommend that, if the parties so wish, the United Nations participate as an observer at such a meeting as a witness and facilitator and thereby assist the parties in regaining the confidence in the process that they themselves have devised and thereby help them in achieving an effective cease-fire and in negotiating a settlement that is fair to all concerned. Such a meeting would also provide an ideal opportunity to discuss the possible deployment of United Nations observers to monitor the implementation of the agreement.

In the meantime, in line with the proposal contained in my letter of 7 October (S/24633) and endorsed in the presidential statement (S/24637), two United Nations personnel have remained in Georgia to provide an initial United Nations presence. Their functions include establishing a United Nations presence in Georgia, maintaining continuous contact with all concerned, providing the United Nations Headquarters with daily situation reports and acting as a two-way link between the United Nations and the parties.

The United Nations presence in Georgia is being further strengthened by the opening this month at Tbilisi of an integrated interim office, which will also focus on development assistance and information support.

(Signed) Boutros BOUTROS-GHALI

Annex

Summary of the report of the mission to Georgia

1. Upon arriving at Tbilisi on 13 October 1992, the mission met with Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, the Chairman of the State Council of the Republic of Georgia, Prime Minister Tangiz Sigua, Defence Minister Tangiz Kitovani and Deputy Prime Minister Sandro Kavsadze. It also met with members of the diplomatic community. On 14 October, the mission flew to Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia, where it received a briefing on the situation on the ground from Mr. Jaba Ioseliani, the Deputy Chairman of the State Council of Georgia, and others, and met with representatives of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia, including the first Deputy Chairman. On the same day the mission flew to Gadauta, where it met with Mr. Vladislav Ardzinba, the Chairman of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia and several of his colleagues. While at Sukhumi and Gudauta, the mission also met with the representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The mission then returned to Tbilisi where, on 15 October, it had a second meeting with Mr. Shevardnadze to review the latest situation and to discuss the findings and possible follow-up measures. The mission left Georgia on 16 October.

The current situation

2. The situation in Abkhazia has seriously deteriorated since the first United Nations mission to Georgia in September (see S/24633). Severe fighting has broken out, the military build-up has intensified, the two sides are accusing each other of the most serious human rights violations and a war mentality seems to be taking hold. In addition, the relations between Georgia and the broker of the 3 September agreement, the Russian Federation, have deteriorated, handicapping the peace process. If the present situation is not reversed quickly, Georgia may find itself at the brink of a larger conflict, possibly involving neighbouring countries.

3. The situation in Abkhazia described in the previous report remained relatively unchanged without any progress being made in the implementation of the 3 September agreement until 1 October when Abkhaz forces, supported by fighters from the north Caucasus, captured the town of Gagra and quickly gained control of the area from the northern cease-fire line along the Bzib river to the border of the Russian Federation to the north and west. At the same time, fighting also resumed on the southern cease-fire line along the Gumista river, just three kilometres north of the Abkhaz capital of Sukhumi. In addition, Abkhaz and north Caucasian forces attacked the town of Ochamchira, located some 55 kilometres south-east of Sukhumi. Should the Abkhaz succeed in capturing Ochamcira, this could lead to the fall of Sukhumi, which would bring nearly 80 per cent of Abkhazia under Abkhaz control. The continued risk of this possibility, not to mention its actual fall, could trigger major military action, which could engulf the area in a major conflict that could involve neighbouring countries.

Status of the implementation of the 3 September agreement

4. The previous United Nations mission had already underlined that the 3 September agreement remained largely unimplemented. Since then, that agreement appears to have completely broken down. The cease-fire accord, which was to come into effect on 5 September and which was never fully implemented, has completely collapsed following the attack by Abkhaz and north Caucasian forces on 1 October. Furthermore, the disarming, disbanding and withdrawal of illegal north Caucasian armed formations and groups called for in the agreement has not taken place. In fact, their number has most likely increased and their movement across the border continues unhindered. It has also not been possible to implement the provision that, once a cease-fire was in force, the armed forces of Georgia present in the conflict zone would not exceed an agreed level required for the protecting of the railway and certain other installations in Abkhazia.

5. The resumption of hostilities has created a new wave of refugees and has led to accusations by both sides of atrocities being committed against the civilian population. Both sides have called for an international commission to investigate these charges. The Georgian authorities stated that the capture of Gagra had forced some 30,000 Georgians, Russians and Armenians to flee to the Russian Federation. In addition, the possibility of the fall of Sukhumi has resulted in a major outflow of its population.

Attempts to revive the 3 September agreement

6. During the first half of October, President Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Federation invited Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, the Chairman of the Georgian State Council, and the other parties to the 3 September agreement, including Mr. Ardzinba, to meet at Sukhumi on 13 October to put the implementation of the agreement back on track. In this connection, Foreign Minister Chikvaidze of Georgia travelled to Moscow for preparatory discussions with Russian Federation Foreign Minister Kozirev. These discussions proved inconclusive as the participants were unsuccessful in bridging their differences. Efforts have continued at the working level.

The position of the Government of Georgia

7. Chairman Shevardnadze stated that Georgia continued to support the full implementation of the 3 September agreement but called for the restoration of the status quo that existed prior to the resumption of fighting of 1 October. In that connection, he added that the United Nations could play an important role in supporting the implementation of the agreement by deploying observers and by being present as an observer at future meetings such as the one proposed by President Yeltsin.

8. Mr. Shevardnadze complained that Georgia had been deceived with regard to the 3 September agreement. He expressed the view that the other parties had not fulfilled their obligations under the agreement. He stressed that, with the resumption of fighting by the Abkhaz side on 1 October, the prospects for

a political solution to the conflict had diminished. He underlined that a crucial question was whether the international community accepted Georgia's territorial integrity and therefore recognized Georgia's right to deploy troops within its own borders.

9. Mr. Shevardnadze expressed deep concern about the hostile intentions of the illegal "Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus" established in the north Caucasus region of the Russian Federation, including its intention to make Sukhumi its capital. He said that he was particularly worried about the objectives of General Dudaev, the leader of the Chechen Republic, who, he believed, had an air force under his control of some 150 planes. He stated that no action had been taken to ensure the withdrawal of the illegal north Caucasian elements from Abkhazia and that their numbers had increased to about 3,000. He underlined the need to ensure that the border between the Russian Federation and Georgia is effectively controlled.

The Abkhaz position

10. The Chairman of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia, Mr. Vladislav Ardzinba, agreed that the 3 September agreement should be implemented. He noted, however, that there was a problem of interpretation. He recalled that, when he attended the meeting in Moscow on 3 September, he had insisted that all Georgian troops must be withdrawn from Abkhazia. This had not occurred. He indicated his preference to conclude a new agreement which explicitly stipulated that all Georgian troops should be withdrawn from Abkhazia.

11. Mr. Ardzinba stated that his objective was not the separation of Abkhazia from Georgia. What was necessary, he stressed, was direct talks between the two sides to agree on their relationship. He stated that he recognized the principle of territorial integrity but that the principle of self-determination also had to be respected.

12. Mr. Ardzinba acknowledged that his side was receiving outside support, in particular from the so-called "Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus".

13. Mr. Ardzinba noted that Abkhazia had declared its own "sovereignty" prior to the admission of the Republic of Georgia to the United Nations and regretted that the international Organization had not taken any notice. He stated that the United Nations could play a very important role in Abkhazia, provided it addressed fairly the issues of concern to the Abkhaz side.

Observations

14. The precarious and potentially explosive situation reported by the previous United Nations mission has clearly worsened. Georgia finds itself on the brink of a major conflict that could involve neighbouring countries. If the situation is not reversed and confidence in the peace process of the 3 September agreement is not rebuilt, large-scale fighting appears inevitable.